

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

TEACHER: LESSON 7

THEME: CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED; WHOSE CONSENT?

In the discussions over the new Constitution of 1787 and the new system of government it would create, a debate arose between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The former group felt that "those most fit to rule should govern" while the latter group feared that an aristocracy would result. Trying to protect our fledgling democracy, views like the two below conveyed the opinion that consent (voting) to be governed must come not only from the elite, but from all the people.

"Who are to be the electors of the ... representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names more than the humble sons of obscurity...The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States."

(James Madison, Fifth U.S. President)

"Restraining the right of suffrage to the property holders would create a division among the people and make enemies of all those who should be excluded."

(Edward Rutledge, signer of the Declaration of Independence, delegate to the Constitutional Convention)

Explain to students the difference between the Federalists and Anti-Federalist political philosophies on the issues of rights for the common people and the power of the central government. They will encounter these terms in their lesson.

Despite the vision of these men that all Americans would have a voice in the direction of their government, the truth is that in our nation's past, there were many ways that certain people were excluded from voting, which are listed below in the activity.

The activity is designed to provide a "scavenger hunt." This will lead students to become acquainted with the evolutionary struggle to increase the size of the "voting pie" so all could have a piece. They will learn that it involved not only efforts by and for African-Americans and women, but also other races, the poor, the uneducated, various religions, citizens abroad, and the physically challenged. They will also learn that at times, our right to vote took "two steps forward, then one step back" as the saying goes.

ACTIVITY:

Distribute copies of the student handout CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED; WHOSE CONSENT? and the TIMELINE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY in order to do this activity. This activity can be done at home or in class, individually or collaboratively.

These are some of the obstacles that prevented voting rights for many citizens throughout our nation's history. The following are some items from the TIMELINE that apply. A question mark means that it could be related but was probably not intended directly to eliminate that particular obstacle.

OBSTACLE:

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Religion:	A, C, D, F, I, K
Lack of property holdings:	B, D, F, G, I, K, W?
Inability to pay a fee:	C, D, G, I, K, U, W?
Lack of English fluency or literacy:	C, D?, I?, K, N, T, V, W?, X, Y
Having been a slave or their ancestor having been a slave:	J, K, M, V, W
Unable to register:	D?, K, T, V, W, Z
Having a disability:	D? , K?, Y, Z
Gender:	D?, H, K? (see XIV sec.2 male), L, N?, R, S
Race:	D?, J, K, M, N?, T, W, Y?
Absent on Election Day:	D?, P
Education:	C, D?, I, K, V?, W, Y
Age:	X

Students will examine the TIMELINE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY and locate Amendments, Sections in the Constitution, laws, and key people that tried to make it possible for more people to "dine at the table of suffrage."

Using only the TIMELINE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY, students are to write for each obstacle the Amendment, Section, law, and/or person that tried to eliminate that particular obstacle to suffrage for all. They should write their findings on the lines provided. They can use items in the TIMELINE as needed, i.e. more than once or more than one item per line. Remind the students to be able to support their choices; some may see some creative connections!

As time permits, ask students to share their list and explain their choices, either to a small group to pool answers, or to the entire class. Remember, there may be some answers not cited as examples above, and these may be very creative and equally legitimate.

Note: Students probably had some epiphanies, those AH HAH! observations, questions or insights while working with the TIMELINE. Perhaps they noticed some curious patterns or repetitions, or maybe some contradictions. For example, notice that some items actually INCREASE obstacles to voting. Another thing that students might notice is that some items are aimed at an obstacle NOT on the list; you could ask them to infer what obstacle might be the target (e.g. item Q). Direct them to write their observations, questions, and insights when they occur so they don't forget and so they can share them also.